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# **Egypt: Party Politics** and the Parliamentary Election

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An Intelligence Assessment

Secret

NESA 84-10185 May 1984

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was coordinated with the Directorate of Operations.

Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Arab-Israeli Division, NESA,

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Key Judgments Information available as of 1 May 1984 was used in this report.	The election on 27 May for the People's Assembly, Egypt's parliament, promises to be a milestone in Egyptian politics. President Mubarak has guaranteed that the election will be free and democratic, and the participation of at least four opposition parties makes it the most open contest ever.	25 <b>X</b> 6
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	We expect the NDP to retain its majority in the Assembly, probably by a healthy margin. Recent election legislation, traditional low voter turnout, the tendency for Egyptians to vote for the government party, and the limited time opposition parties have had to organize will all work in the NDP's favor.	
	Egypt will have a true multiparty system for the first time if the New Wafd Party—the NDP's strongest opponent—realizes its leadership's somewhat optimistic prediction that it will receive 30 percent of the vote. We believe the New Wafd will do almost this well and will make a strong showing in major urban areas, in parts of the Nile delta, and among Coptic Christians.	
	A strong minority opposition representation probably would not dramatically change the functioning of the Assembly, because the NDP would retain control of key committees. Such representation, however, might force Mubarak to make some concessions to the minority parties to forestall concerted opposition to his reelection as president in October 1987.	
	The election probably will not change US-Egyptian relations fundamentally, although a significant opposition representation would encourage Mubarak to increase the rhetoric of nonalignment. Mubarak almost certainly will maintain Egypt's commitment to the Camp David accords regardless of opposition pressure to drop them. Egyptian-Israeli relations, in our judgment, are more likely to depend on Israel's parliamentary election in July than on the composition of the Egyptian Assembly.	
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Egypt: Party Politics and the Parliamentary Election	25X1
The election on 27 May for the People's Assembly, Egypt's legislative body, will be a benchmark in the evolution of the country's multiparty system. Five opposition parties have gained legal status since 1978 and are eligible to field candidates in contests against the government's National Democratic Party. It appears that at least four will participate in the election.	chairman, although he generally leaves the role of spokesman to Prime Minister Fuad Muhi al-Din, who is the NDP's secretary general. Mubarak announced in January 1984 his intention to stay on as NDP 25X1 chairman, despite opposition demands that he stand above party politics. Mubarak has publicly stated that a strong government party is vital to the country's stability.
This will be the first test of a new election law, enacted last summer over opposition objections. According to the new law, all candidates are required to belong to a party—in the last election about a third of the elected delegates ran as independents. In addition, a party must get at least 8 percent of the vote nationwide to win seats in the Assembly.	The NDP, which was formed by Sadat out of the centrist elements of the Arab Socialist Union in 1978, is the best organized Egyptian political party. Its elaborate structure parallels that of the government, with congresses, committees, and bureaus at the district, governorate, and national levels. Nevertheless, the party is an elite organization and historically
The election also will test President Mubarak's commitment to political liberalization. His credentials already have been tarnished by the new election law, which will make it difficult for most of the opposition parties to gain representation in the Assembly. They doubt that the election will be fair, despite Mubarak's guarantees.	has had difficulty fielding candidates for Assembly seats that are constitutionally reserved for workers and peasants.  25X1  The NDP has its own publication, Mayu, and indirectly benefits from the government's influence over such semiofficial publications as the mass daily Al-Ahram. The NDP recently increased media exposure by converting Mayu from a weekly to a daily.
The regime's difficult relations with the opposition parties suggest increasing apprehension about the challenge to the government party, particularly from the New Wafd.	Mubarak has privately predicted that the NDP will have no trouble retaining its overwhelming majority in the Assembly. He recently told a former US official that the NDP will win, not because of any unique virtue but because it is natural for the Egyptian masses—especially those in the countryside—to vote for the party that can deliver goods and services.
The Political Parties  NDP: The Government Party The National Democratic Party controls more than	A well-informed NDP Assembly member, a former independent, predicts that the NDP will garner 65 to 70 percent of the vote, while the Minister of State for People's Assembly and Consultative Council Affairs recently predicted that the government party will get 80 percent.
three-quarters of the seats in the People's Assembly and all of its key committees. Mubarak is the party's	25X1

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# The New Wafd: Off and Running

The New Wafd probably will be the NDP's strongest opponent in the coming election, although the party regained legal status only in January 1984. The New Wafd's leaders are veteran politicians with broad experience in government and party organization. Before the party was legalized, Wafd leaders held regular organization and strategy meetings.

By late last fall, the party was campaigning in urban areas and throughout the Nile delta.

Many of the Wafd's leaders and members are wealthy enough to help finance the party's activities. The high quality of the first edition of its newspaper, *Al-Wafd*, which was published in late March, indicates that the party has solid financial backing.

Embassy reporting indicates that the New Wafd is counting heavily on bases of support traditionally enjoyed by the old Wafd. Neiman Gomaa, the Wafd's deputy secretary general, asserted to Embassy officials that Christian Copts will vote for the Wafd because the party stands for Muslim-Copt harmony. Rumors of a Wafd-Muslim Brotherhood alliancedenied by party leaders and played up in the government-owned press—and the party's declaration that shariah (Islamic law) should be the principal source of legislation may have eroded the Wafd's support among Copts, in our view. Gomaa also claimed widespread sympathy for the Wafd among the elite, academics, older Egyptians, and landowners. He told Embassy officials that 80 percent of Cairo University's faculty had joined the party as of October 1983. Party leader Fuad Siraj al-Din told Embassy officials that in 1978 more than 70 percent of the Wafd's members were young people born after the 1952 revolution.

We believe that most of the votes garnered by the Wafd will be cast because of its history, not its current policies. Some political observers question whether the Wafd can become a mass party, for the easily identifiable targets—especially British imperialism—against which the old Wafd successfully rallied Egyptians are gone. Moreover, the Wafd's call for a return to free market principles would eliminate many of the social welfare benefits that Egypt's poor have received since Nasir.

In foreign affairs, the Wafd has backed away from its earlier support of Mubarak's foreign policy. Its recent manifesto terms the Camp David accords "basically invalid" and declares that Israel has no right to ask Egypt to honor its commitments under the peace treaty, when Israel has violated the letter and spirit of the accords. It also calls the liberation of Jerusalem from Israeli occupation a holy cause. The manifesto, however, stops short of rejecting the peace treaty with Israel.

# NPUG: Solid but Limited Support on the Left

The leftist National Progressive Unionist Grouping (NPUG), led by the Marxist Khalid Muhi al-Din, is the Mubarak regime's most vociferous opponent. The NPUG, legalized in 1978, is a mixed bag of most of the leftist elements in Egypt, including Communists, Nasirists, and a few Ba'thists.

The NPUG's weekly newspaper Al-Ahali routinely publishes sharp criticisms of the government. It charges that "Sadatists" still are in control and that the government is soft on corruption and is overly dependent on the United States. The NPUG's key differences with the Mubarak regime's foreign policy are its demands to drop the Camp David accords and normalization of relations with Israel. Domestically, the party calls for a return to comprehensive national economic planning and the nationalization of wholesale trade and banking.

The US Embassy reports that the NPUG is the best organized of the opposition parties but that its base of support is limited and localized. Its strongest appeal is among intellectuals and the working class, especially urban industrial workers. Party leader Muhi al-Din told Embassy officials that about 10 percent of the party's following is committed to a specific ideology, while the rest support the party because of its general leftist orientation and image as the champion of the poor and oppressed. According to Embassy reporting, the NPUG is active in about half of Egypt's governorates, including most of the larger and more populous ones.

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The NPUG holds no seats in the Assembly. Party leader Muhi al-Din, however, claims that NPUG won 280,000 of the more than 3 million votes cast nationwide in the 1979 election—even though it campaigned in only 50 of 176 electoral districts and had no newspaper. An NPUG official recently told Embassy officers that NPUG is finding new support in the Sinai and other areas, and party leaders contend that the NPUG will have no difficulty in meeting the 8-percent requirement.

# The Socialist Labor Party: The Current Voice of the Opposition

The moderately leftist Socialist Labor Party (SLP) holds 21 seats in the People's Assembly—more than any other opposition party. The SLP's leader, Ibrahim Shukri, thus is ostensibly the leader of the opposition.

The SLP has become increasingly critical of the Mubarak regime on both foreign and domestic policy issues. As outlined in *Al-Shaab*, the party's weekly newspaper, the SLP demands a "reconsideration" of Egypt's special relationship with the United States, especially on aid issues. It calls for freezing the Camp David accords and breaking diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv unless the Israelis withdraw from Lebanon, cease establishing settlements on the West Bank and in Gaza, and return the disputed Sinai border area of Taba. The party publicly supported Mubarak's meeting in December 1983 with PLO Chairman Arafat.

Domestically, the SLP sharply criticizes the inequitable distribution of income in Egypt. It proposes a wage and price agency that would impose a ceiling on salaries and bonuses—especially for corporate chairmen and directors—and tie wages to both productivity and the cost of living.

The SLP's confrontation with the regime over policy issues recently has been sharpened by SLP allegations that Shukri has been the victim of unfair campaign practices by the NDP. The party charges that attempts by NDP members to prevent Shukri from making a campaign speech late last summer resulted in a physical attack on the Labor leader. The SLP says that Shukri was attacked by NDP "hooligans" in February of this year during an appearance at a mosque in the Nile delta province of Daqahliyya.

# The Socialist Liberal Party: Fading Fast

The Socialist Liberal Party, formed in 1978 out of rightist elements in the Arab Socialist Union under the leadership of Mustafa Kamal Murad (a Free Officer and friend of Sadat), is generally regarded as the weakest of the older opposition parties. In the past the party has claimed support from the more conservative segments of Egyptian youth as well as the older generation and some former ministers and deputies of the old Wafd party. The legalization of the New Wafd, in our view, has eroded some of this backing.

Recent internal dissension and defections of party notables have further weakened the Liberals. The party's vice chairman, Salah Rifa'i, resigned earlier this year in protest over perquisites given to party secretaries. According to Embassy reporting, Muhammad Abd al-Shafei, the party's deputy chairman, and Olfat Kamal, the last Liberal deputy in the Assembly, both have defected to the Wafd.

The Liberals generally support the Mubarak government's foreign policy. They support Camp David as "the only possible course" toward peace in the Middle East but place the burden for normalization of Egyptian-Israeli relations on Tel Aviv. On domestic policy, however, the party is highly critical of the "Muhi al-Din government's" failure to curb corruption and the growth of the public sector.

# The Umma Party: A Fundamentalist Safety Valve?

The Umma Party is the most Islamic oriented of the legal opposition parties. It was formally recognized in June 1983 despite the Ministry of Interior's objections that it was a religious party and therefore would violate the 1977 parties law. The Supreme Administrative Court ruled that the party's platform—basically a call for stricter adherence to Islam—was a legitimate basis for a party because it appealed to a segment of Egyptian society that had no other legal political outlet.

Although it has the same name as the first modern Egyptian political party, founded in 1906, the new Umma's platform bears no resemblance to its predecessor's program of political and social reform on the

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European model. The party's initial declaration called for the immediate application of Islamic law; veiling and conservative dress for women; the closing of nightclubs, coffee houses, and gambling casinos; prohibition of pornography; and the flogging of blackmarketeers and corrupt businessmen. The party's founder, Ahmad al-Sabahei, has taken the pen name "Ahmad Khomeyni" to signify the Islamic revolution that he seeks to bring about—not through violence but through the Constitution and democratic process. Al-Sabahei nevertheless maintains that the Umma Party is not exclusively a religious one and that it opposes Islamic radicalism and is open to any Egyptian.

In our judgment, the government probably sees the Umma as a convenient and relatively harmless means of defusing opposition criticism about restrictions on the formation of parties. The Umma has no experienced leadership, no newspaper, no funds,

# The Regime's Control of the Campaign

Mubarak has said repeatedly that the parliamentary election will be open and fair.

Mubarak's comments in private conversations with US officials indicate that he believes the NDP will win handily without the dirty tricks and vote tampering that opposition politicians say characterized parliamentary elections under Sadat.

Western and Egyptian political observers agree that the new election law, passed last summer without consultation with opposition leaders, already stacks the deck heavily in the NDP's favor. Critics have denounced the new law's establishment of a party list system with independent candidates prohibited, as an attempt to stifle the democratic process (see the inset). Mubarak claims that the party list method strengthens the multiparty system (see the inset). NPUG leader Muhi al-Din asserts that the real reason is that the NDP could not break the family loyalties that in the past have elected many independents to the People's Assembly—102 in 1979—and could prevent the government from obtaining a docile NDP majority. Another aspect of the new law—the requirement that a party receive at least 8 percent of the nation-wide vote to win any seats—will eliminate the weaker opposition parties from the Assembly.

Mubarak has shown increasing willingness to use, or sanction the use of, legal instruments to control and curtail the opposition's activity. The Wafd, in particular, has been the object of governmental harassment, especially since the regime lost its court case to block the party's legalization in January

In April the government tried to impound the second issue of the Wafd's newspaper on the grounds that an article in it jeopardized the government's case in a trial of Islamic extremists. This was the first time the Mubarak regime attempted to close an opposition newspaper—and the second time it lost a case against the Wafd.

The government can influence the election in a number of ways short of direct intervention, especially through its control of the mass media. We believe the regime increasingly will seek legal pretexts to deny the opposition access to the media as it becomes more unsure about how the public will receive opposition criticism. In mid-April, in a clear attempt to restrict the opposition in an area critical to the NDP, Cairo officials prohibited campaign posters from "walls, electric power cubicles, tunnels, bridges, and historic buildings" in the city. The government has yet to

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# The New Election Law The May election will be the first held under Law 114, promulgated in August 1983. It establishes a party list system, replacing the old constituency system, and eliminates independent candidates. The new election law increases the number of elected deputies from 382 to 448. The president may still appoint up to 10 additional delegates. Electoral districts have been redrawn—there are now 48 districts compared to 176 in the 1979 election—making them much larger than the two- or three-member districts from which the present deputies were elected. At least 31 of the districts must have a female candidate, and in all districts at least 50 percent of the seats must go to workers or peasants. The principle of proportional representation, together with the larger districts, theoretically gives opposition parties a greater chance to be represented in the Assembly. Seats in the Assembly will be allocated by party according to the share of the vote each party gets in each district—provided it gets at least 8 percent of the vote nationwide. Seats left over after proportional distribution will go to the party with the most votes nationwide. The new law apparently abolishes by elections to fill seats vacated during the term of the Assembly. Instead, vacancies will be filled by persons next on the original electoral lists or from standby lists if all candidates from a party's election list already hold seats.

The regime is effectively using the government-owned press to exploit opposition vulnerabilities. For example, NPUG's supposed link with Communist groups is a constant theme. The regime also has publicized the Wafd-Muslim Brotherhood dialogue in hopes of stimulating a backlash among Copts against the Wafd. At the same time, Mubarak was conducting a highly 25X1 publicized campaign to win Coptic support for the 25X1 NDP. 25X1 25X1 25X1 **Opposition Maneuvering:** Confrontation With the Regime Opposition politicians have focused on the issue of 25X1 political freedoms since the new election law was passed, even though they had little hope that the government would accede to their demands. Since last summer, opposition parties have contested the new 25X1 election law, called for an interim government to ensure fair elections, and demanded that Mubarak step down as NDP leader. A short-lived Committee of National Forces for the Defense of Democracy 25X1 (CDD), formed in fall 1983, presented the regime with a list of extreme demands and did little to advance opposition credibility.

announce whether opposition candidates will have access to television and radio air time. According to opposition press reports, the government already has ruled out the use of television. We believe the regime will not risk—without legal justification—the criticism that denying air time to the opposition would bring, but we expect the opposition's access to be extremely limited.

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Similarly, the opposition's boycott of the

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# Mubarak on Party Politics

## On the party list system:

All my concern has been that we should achieve the system that would ensure the following points: encouraging the good elements to participate in the election and to enter the parliamentary councils; providing the opposition with the opportunity to express its views and to defend its stances; making the candidates' party platforms—not fanaticism, influence, or financial power—the basis for preferring some candidates to others; enlarging the scope for the voters so that they will be able to choose from several deputies instead of one deputy for a constituency. I have found that these considerations can be achieved to a larger degree through elections by the list system.

Speech to NDP Youth Conference 19 July 1983

## On the NDP:

It is the nature of people in the developing countries—and Egypt is one of these countries—to support the party that is led by the head of state. I personally cannot prevent the people from joining the party that I am leading, just as I cannot compel them to join it.

Interview with Kuwait Al-Tadamun 3 November 1983

# On a multiparty system:

We have six parties.... Are these not enough to practice the experiment? Let us first begin with reforming what exists and setting solid party foundations. Later we can amend the parties law and open the door to several parties. It will be useful that we move gradually along the road to democracy.

Interview with Al-Watan al-Arabi 29 December 1983

# On opposition parties:

We do not fear this or that party, so long as it operates within the framework of legitimacy and supremacy of the law; this is the best safeguard for any freedom or democracy.... Why should we fear it (the Wafd)? Is it not an Egyptian party? We have accepted for ourselves the principle of opinions, of the parties, of divergent trends.... As to whether these (other) parties appeal to the ordinary Egyptian citizens, my answer is no, since many segments of the people are averse to joining parties, are hesitant, or refrain.... At present we notice that the parties in Egypt have no roots.

Interview with Kuwait Al-Tadamun 3 November 1983

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fall election to the Consultative Council, a body with	No Combined Opposition List, After All
almost no power, had little effect because, by law, the party that receives the most votes—which would have	Rumors that the opposition parties would try to meet
been the NDP in any case—wins all seats in the	the 8-percent threshold by submitting a combined list
Council. <sup>1</sup>	of candidates began circulating after the new election
	law was enacted, according to Embassy and press
The Consultative Council, created by Sadat in 1980, is Egypt's	reports. Key figures in several parties told Embassy
other parliamentary institution. It is an advisory body and has no	officials that, once the election was over, elected
legislative powers. The Council has 140 elected members who serve six-year terms, and 70 members appointed by the president.	delegates on a combined list would resume their
Elections for half of the Council's seats are held every three years;	original party affiliation or independent status.
the party that gets a simple majority of the votes wins all the seats	
in the election.	

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The opposition could not form such a list. Liberal The NPUG and SLP parties will also have difficulty 25X1 leader Kamal Murad was the leading proponent of the meeting the 8-percent threshold. We believe, however, scheme, but his party is held in low esteem by other that they have a fair chance of doing so and thereby opposition politicians. Moreover, the New Wafd apgaining a few seats in the Assembly. pears to be in such a strong position that it had no incentive to throw in its lot with weaker parties. Even The daily functioning of the People's Assembly proba-25X1 Labor and NPUG decided not to unite under a single bly will not be affected by any election result short of Labor ticket, as an NDP official suggested to Embasa clear win by an opposition party—which we judge to 25X1 sy officials, although Labor's moderate leftist stance be the least likely outcome. would have complemented NPUG's solid support. Instead, four of the five opposition parties have 25X1 submitted separate lists. According to press reports, Labor will run in 46 of the 48 election districts; the The NDP, however, will 25X1 NPUG and New Wafd, in 44; and the Liberals, in control key committees—foreign affairs, legislative only 27. The weak Umma Party apparently could not affairs, national security, economic affairs, and budcome up with any candidates and so will not compete get. The Assembly never has fully exercised its con-25X1 in the election. siderable constitutional powers and under continued NDP dominance probably will not begin doing so (see the inset). 25X1 **Outlook: Election Prospects and Their Implications** The representation of opposition parties in the Assem-We believe that the NDP will easily retain its majorbly could, however, affect Mubarak's reelection. ity in the People's Assembly, largely because of its Mubarak's six-year term will expire in October 1987, 25X6 superior resources and the Egyptian tradition of supduring the term of the Assembly elected this year. port for the government party. The Constitution provides that, before submitting his 25X6 nomination for a second term to a popular vote, his candidacy must be approved by two-thirds of the Assembly. United action by the opposition could block Mubarak's candidacy We expect the New Wafd to make the strongest 25X6 showing of all the opposition parties, although in our judgment Wafdist predictions of 25 to 30 percent of Implications for the United States 25X6 the vote may be optimistic. The government's anti-Wafd campaign, however, could backfire and rally We do not expect the parliamentary election to affect voters to the party's defense. We also believe the appreciably US interests in Egypt and the Middle Wafd will attract votes from supporters of other East. Barring a very unlikely opposition victory, which 25X1 opposition parties. would force Mubarak to make basic policy changes, Cairo still will have strong motivations for retaining None of the other opposition parties will make an US-Egyptian ties—US financial and military aid and impressive showing on its own, in our judgment. In the need for US leadership in securing a comprehenparticular, the Socialist Liberal Party is unlikely to sive Middle East peace settlement. Mubarak's recent get the required 8 percent of the vote. Without seats allusions to improvement in Egyptian-Soviet relations in the Assembly, the Liberals and the Umma Party will lose members to the stronger opposition parties 25X1 and may disappear from the political scene.

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# The People's Assembly

The People's Assembly has important constitutional powers, including nomination of the president. It shares with the president the authority to propose legislation and approves the government's general policy and budget. Assembly deputies have the right to question ministers, the prime minister, and even the president. The Assembly also has the power to pass a vote of no confidence in any cabinet member.

In practice, however, the People's Assembly has exercised few of its constitutional powers. It is primarily a forum for public debate, channeling public grievances to government agencies, and recommending solutions for areas of government failure. It routinely ratifies decisions made by the president and the government—a pattern set during the early part of Nasir's rule, when Sadat was Speaker of the Assembly. Only the Assembly's budget committee has been active and fairly effective in recent years in influencing budget policy.

Delegates serve five-year terms. Under the Constitution, the president can dissolve the Assembly at any time, but this action must be approved by popular referendum and a new election held within 60 days.

and his increased criticism of Israel are only partly related to campaign politics. They have at least as much to do with Egypt's participation in the Non-aligned Movement and its increased cooperation with other Arab and Islamic states.

Mubarak's nonaligned rhetoric and criticism of Israel may persist if a larger opposition minority in the Assembly makes him more sensitive to opposition criticism. In our judgment, however, Mubarak will resist opposition pressure to drop the Camp David accords. We believe future Egyptian-Israeli relations will depend more on the composition of the Israeli Government than on the outcome of the Egyptian election.

A fairly conducted parliamentary election will enhance Mubarak's image as a democrat and will demonstrate that a key US friend in the region shares a commitment to political liberty. Mubarak will be tempted to exploit this good will by pressing harder for more US aid.

A fair election will not mean that Mubarak suddenly has become a genuine democrat. We believe Mubarak wants greater political liberalization for Egypt but that his concept of democracy falls short of the US model. Feedback from moderate opponents is an important element of his leadership style,

Mubarak is likely to continue his slow evolution toward democracy—particularly if he perceives this as a way of leaving his mark on Egyptian history—but an unruly Assembly could lead him to withdraw some of the newly granted political freedoms.

Egyptian leaders have repeatedly told US officials that they will not try to reduce consumer subsidies or enact other economic reforms until after the election. Mubarak evidently is postponing unpopular measures to avoid generating popular support for the opposition parties. We believe that the government's concern about the campaign is genuine, but we do not expect major action even after the election. Egyptian leaders have repeatedly found excuses to delay painful austerity policies. The Tunisian and Moroccan food price riots are fresh in their minds, and they will continue to resist US urging to accelerate economic reform.

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